UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

ACC

Administrative Committee on Coordination

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ENGLISH AND FRENCH ONLY

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON COORDINATION AT ITS FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF 1997

(Geneva, 10 and 11 April 1997)

1. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) held its first regular session of 1997 at Geneva on 10 and 11 April 1997, under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The agenda for the session was as follows:

1. Adoption of the agenda.

2. Review of developments affecting international cooperation and development, and their implications for the United Nations system:

   (a) Reform and strengthening of the United Nations system;

   (b) Peace-building.

3. Follow-up, within the system, to ACC initiatives and decisions:

   (a) Coordinated follow-up to international conferences;

   (b) United Nations System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa;

   (c) Universal access to basic communication and information services;

   (d) The Graça Machel study: impact of armed conflict on children.

4. Other matters:

   (a) Administrative questions;

   (b) Other issues.

2. A private meeting of ACC, attended by all ACC members, was held on 10 April 1997.

3. The present report covers the outcome of discussions at the regular session of the Committee. In addition, it includes a brief summary of the discussions on the issue of the reform and strengthening of the United Nations system, which was on the agenda of the regular session as item 2 (a), but was in fact

considered at the above-mentioned private meeting. In addition to recording the specific decisions reached on the matter that require follow-up within the inter-agency machinery, the present summary briefly highlights those elements of the discussion that are directly relevant to and provide the context for such follow-up.

I. REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT, AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

A. Reform and strengthening of the United Nations system

4. Consideration of the above theme by ACC, at its second regular session of 1996, resulted in the adoption of a joint statement, that was issued in the form of a press release (SG/SM/6106, 17 November 1996). The approaches outlined in the joint statement guided the further discussions that ACC conducted on the theme at its private meeting, immediately prior to the current session, with the participation of the Secretary-General's Executive Coordinator on United Nations Reform.

5. The executive heads reviewed reform-related developments in their respective organizations and their impact on the system's relevance and responsiveness to changing requirements, as well as its image. Special attention was given to and support was expressed for, the Secretary-General's reform initiatives within the United Nations itself. In particular, the executive heads expressed appreciation to the Secretary-General for sharing with them the reform measures that formed part of the first phase (track I) of the process (see A/51/829), and expressed interest and support in relation to the broader package of reforms proposals (track II) that the Secretary-General intends to submit to the General Assembly for its consideration in July 1997.

6. In relation to track II, the Secretary-General stated that, at that early stage, he was in a position to give only preliminary indications of the directions in which he would be proceeding. He noted that his July report would take full account of the state of intergovernmental deliberations in the various working groups of the General Assembly dealing with reform issues, and would draw on the many studies and proposals already on the table. The report would build on the considerable work under way throughout the system, and would advance proposals consistent with the course already set. At the same time, he would also introduce ideas of his own on ways in which the Organization could position itself to fulfil with greater effectiveness and impact the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations. The report would address further reforms required in the four broad sectors of the work of the Organization that had been defined in the context of track I (peace and security, humanitarian affairs, economic and social affairs, and development operations), as well as in the human rights area. It would also cover further managerial, organizational and technological improvements that might need to be introduced, as well as issues related to the future financing of the Organization, including the crucial issue of resources for development. The thrust of the report would be on how the United Nations should prepare itself to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

7. The Secretary-General also noted that in the light of the state of negotiations in the various working groups of the General Assembly, the report would, in all likelihood, address different aspects of the functioning of the main deliberative Charter organs. It would also analyse the situation in the regions, bearing in mind the reviews that the regional commissions were themselves conducting. It would look into ways of deepening and broadening the relations of the United Nations with civil society, including with non-governmental organizations from the South, where such contacts need to be developed further.

8. The Secretary-General added that he expected the report, while focusing on the United Nations itself, to approach the future of the Organization within a broader vision of the future of the United Nations system as a whole. He would draw, in that respect, on current discussions in ACC, as well as on the exchanges that he was having with several executive heads. In the same context, he expressed the hope that discussions on reform at the current session would pave the way for a stronger ACC, capable of leading the process of system-wide reform and of taking decisions with a direct impact on the policies and programmes of its member organizations, as well as on intergovernmental deliberations. He also anticipated that his July 1997 report would have something to say about the application of Charter provisions on coordination and various aspects of the relationship agreements. He concluded by noting that, beyond leading reform processes in their respective organizations, the executive heads had a collective duty to determine how the system as a whole could function more effectively and efficiently. It was important that the totality of the system's activities should continue to pass the test of relevance. His report would address any system-wide issues in that perspective. He hoped that the executive heads would take the opportunity of the current meeting to contribute to that objective.

9. In the ensuing discussions, it became clear that reform processes were entering an important new phase throughout the system. The importance of sharing information on those processes was emphasized. The objective, as set out in the joint ACC statement on reform, should be to ensure that those processes were mutually supportive, that implications for other organizations were identified and taken into account, and that best practices were institutionalized and drawn upon system-wide. That applied not only at the managerial level but also at the strategic level, and should encompass actions under way to draw up new mission statements and reorient policies and programme priorities. The process should be guided by the realization that the public, as well as - in many ways - Governments, viewed and judged the system in its entirety; the future of each part of the system could not be separated from that of the other parts of the system.

10. Approaches to inter-agency coordination and cooperation were also reviewed. It was noted that greater system-wide coherence should not be viewed and pursued as an imposition. It should be approached as a joint effort to elaborate common policy objectives, and to pursue, on that basis, all opportunities for programme cooperation, and an effective pooling of capabilities and resources at the headquarters and - particularly important - at the country level. A new and more comprehensive approach to the concept of security should underlie that effort. The principle of subsidiarity should guide the process of translating

such a concept into organizational structures and actual work programmes, and of further rationalizing the division of labour within the system, taking into account the mandates and capabilities of each of the organizations of the system. The principle of subsidiarity was particularly relevant to United Nations reform, given the broad mandate of the Organization.

11. The implications for the system of some of the reform measures introduced by the Secretary-General for the United Nations in track I were reviewed in that light. Several suggestions were also made on areas requiring particular attention in the context of track II and the reform processes under way in the system. Issues highlighted in that context included the strengthening of linkages with civil society, in particular with the private sector; organizational reforms of the "common system", particularly the need to redress some of the rigidities in personnel policies and practices that currently characterize that system; the need to ensure that new programme demands are matched by adequate resources; and the need to redress a tendency towards micro-management on the part of intergovernmental bodies, which diverted attention from their essential policy-making responsibilities, encroached on the managerial responsibilities and accountability of executive heads, and was increasingly hindering progress in achieving the very reforms called for by those bodies.

12. *Interest was expressed in the proposal for the holding of a forum or retreat outside the regular sessions of ACC that would enable executive heads to pursue broader issues of reform and reflect in some depth on the future of the system and the policy challenges ahead.* The Secretary-General thanked the Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for having brought up the idea with him. He also referred to the contribution that the Staff College could make to the exercise. *The need for effective preparation for such a discussion was generally emphasized. It was understood that the Secretary-General would write to the executive heads proposing a programme, timing, location and other organizational arrangements for their consideration.*

13. *There was general support for the proposals contained in the annotated agenda regarding the exchange of experience in reforms in the system* (see annex II, paras. 8-10). *It was agreed that work should continue to elaborate a report outlining reform processes under way in the system; the report should be finalized in time for ACC's second regular session of 1997 so that it could be available at the next session of the General Assembly,* when the Secretary-General's report on reform within the United Nations would be considered.

14. *The Secretary-General also proposed that work be initiated on the preparation of a publication that would highlight the way in which the work of the various organizations of the system affected the daily lives of people. The United Nations would write to all organizations in that regard.*

15. *The proposals in the annotated agenda concerning the role and functioning of ACC and/or staff support for the Committee were also welcomed* (see annex II, paras. 11-16). *Those proposals would be reflected in a final submission to ACC on the review of the functioning of ACC, for consideration at the second regular session of the Committee for 1997.*

16. On the recommendation of the Secretary-General and in line with the proposal in the annotated agenda, *ACC decided to address, at its second regular session of 1997, the issue of the strengthening of the system's links with civil society, as an important dimension of the system's reform agenda*, taking into account ongoing work within the ACC subsidiary machinery.

17. Finally, with reference to the issue of micro-management by intergovernmental bodies (see para. 11 above), *the Secretary-General indicated that he would arrange for the preparation and circulation of a paper outlining possible elements of a system-wide approach to the respective responsibilities of executive heads, on the one hand, and legislative and governing bodies of organizations on the other, which could assist them in pursuing and clarifying the issue as part of the ongoing reform processes.*

B. Peace-building

18. The Secretary-General opened the discussion by noting that the basic issue before the Committee under item 2 (b) was how to draw maximum advantage of the range of capabilities available in the system - both its capabilities for political or humanitarian intervention, and its capacity to address the basic factors that were at the root of ongoing or potential conflicts - to ensure that conflicts were prevented or, when that did not prove possible, that they could be resolved on a lasting basis. The objective should be to integrate the system's analytical capabilities, its capacity for political mediation and humanitarian intervention, and its experience in development cooperation into a coherent force to build and sustain peace.

19. The Secretary-General noted that in recent years, considerable progress, both conceptually and in terms of practical experience, had been made in understanding and acting on the concept of peace-building.

20. At the analytical level, the limitation of the concept of a continuum between peacekeeping, peacebuilding and development had become increasingly evident, and it was clear that there was no linear relationship between those phases. Early warning capabilities in the economic and social areas should be drawn upon in support of political monitoring work in order to foresee and forestall potential crises. Furthermore, a capacity to put in place or quickly resume the development process must, to the extent possible, be built into political interventions. Indeed, all opportunities must be seized, even at the height of a conflict, to continue to provide development support in sectors or areas of the country where it was feasible. And development assistance should encompass the various elements that could contribute not only to economic growth but also to building institutions and practices that enabled societies to overcome potential crisis in a peaceful and democratic way.

21. The Secretary-General further noted that arrangements and understandings had begun to be developed in recent years to improve coordination in country situations in which political programmes mandated by the Security Council or the General Assembly were in place, and ensure that United Nations agencies' activities were harmonized with, or adjusted to maximize their contribution to the overall political strategy. System-wide arrangements and mechanisms had

also been strengthened, chiefly through the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), to address large-scale humanitarian crises. All those arrangements, however, needed to be better integrated in order to provide coherent policy and operational guidance to the system's peace-building effort in support of the countries concerned and their populations.

22. ACC members agreed that peace-building, as a broad-based approach to crisis prevention and resolution, should comprise integrated and coordinated actions aimed at addressing any combination of political, military, humanitarian, human rights, environmental, economic, social, cultural and demographic factors so as to ensure that conflict was prevented or resolved on a lasting basis, and that the process of long-term and sustainable development was in place and was not interrupted where possible, or was resumed as expeditiously as possible. It was recognized that political, humanitarian, economic and social factors could not, in most situations, be effectively dealt with independently of one another, and were best addressed in a holistic and mutually reinforcing manner. The aim should be to mobilize a timely and well-coordinated system-wide response to potential and actual crisis situations, tailored to the requirements of each particular case.

Resource mobilization

23. ACC members emphasized the importance of addressing the resource implications of support requirements of countries threatened by or emerging from conflicts. In the same context, ACC underscored the importance of and expressed support for the efforts of the World Bank to establish a post-conflict financing facility. *ACC called for a stronger commitment by bilateral and other donors, and stressed the need to harmonize resource mobilization efforts in order to ensure adequate availability of funding for immediate rehabilitation and for recovery activities. It was concluded that renewed attention also needed to be given to ways of closing gaps between various phases that limit economic and social rehabilitation in affected countries, and of achieving a better articulation between consolidated appeals and development-focused round tables and consultative groups. It was recognized that in order to ensure speedy disbursement it was essential to support and assist affected countries to enhance their absorptive capacity. The United Nations system must contribute actively to that effort.*

Early warning and preventive action

24. *ACC members stressed the need to reinforce the system's overall capacity for early warning, building on existing arrangements.* In turn, *that required enhancing the system's capacity for regular and systematic information exchanges and for an integrated assessment of trends, as well as a strengthening, to these ends, of linkages between the system's analytical capacities and its operations* in the political, peace-building, humanitarian and development fields. The objective should be to enable the United Nations to alert the international community in a timely manner to potential crisis situations, and to enable the system to act early to avert such crises. *Arrangements also needed to be strengthened to cope with large and complex emergencies that could have repercussions on a whole region and beyond. For that purpose, all of the system's substantive capacities for analysing trends and factors that could lead*

to crisis situations and for scenario-building should be effectively mobilized. In that regard, capacities within the system for analysing and assessing global problems such as social exclusion, the repression of minorities, drug trafficking, organized crime and money-laundering, which had destabilizing effects on weak and vulnerable societies, should be fully drawn upon.

25. It was recognized that any such arrangements could not be a substitute for the necessary political will on the part of Member States to ensure timely preventive action and a concomitant commitment by the membership to support and finance such action. As far as financing is concerned, the international community needed to be constantly reminded that dealing with war and its consequences, and the peacekeeping, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities that had to be carried out if a conflict is not averted, are always far more costly than preventive action.

Peace-building in countries where the United Nations operates specific political programmes mandated by the Security Council or the General Assembly

26. *ACC addressed approaches to peace-building in country situations in which, in addition to ongoing humanitarian and development activities, the United Nations operates political programmes, normally mandated by the General Assembly or the Security Council, that had as their primary purpose the prevention, control and/or resolution of a conflict. It recognized that in most such situations, the achievement of those political objectives and the consolidation of peace needs to be supported by an integrated effort by the whole of the United Nations system to address the various factors which have caused or are threatening a conflict.* Peace-building, so conceived, does not replace ongoing humanitarian and development activities in countries which are threatened by or are emerging from crisis. On the contrary, it aims to build on them and introduce further activities or reorientation of existing activities, which - in addition to their intrinsic humanitarian or developmental value - have a politically relevant value because they reduce the risk of conflict or contribute to creating conditions most conducive to reconciliation, reconstruction and recovery. *ACC considered it important that in such situations, the respective roles of various actors within the United Nations system, both at headquarters and the field, should be clearly defined.*

27. *ACC recognized that* in the first instance, *in those special situations, political guidance and support must be provided to United Nations organizations active in the country concerned in order to ensure that their activities do in fact serve the overall political objective of conflict prevention or resolution, and to promote coordination to that end.* At the same time, such political guidance should take into account and benefit from the expertise of those as well as other concerned organizations concerning the economic and social conditions that impinged on the actual or potential conflict under consideration. Such guidance should be provided in a way that respected the mandates of the organizations concerned and their existing lines of authority and sources of funding.

28. In particular, ACC members concurred that in such situations, the Secretary-General, having been entrusted with the strategic political mandate by the Security Council or the General Assembly, and being responsible for

performing the principal political functions - good offices, mediation, negotiation, peacekeeping, verification etc. - had to satisfy himself that the operations of United Nations programmes, funds and agencies active in the country(ies) concerned were consistent with the overall strategy. He would also rely on them to implement many of the activities required by his mandate.

29. *ACC agreed that in each such situation, there should be accepted arrangements, at the headquarters level as well as in the field - normally through the Special Representative of the Secretary-General - to enable the Secretary-General to provide guidance to the system as a whole, and to ensure that the United Nations programmes, funds and agencies that were active in the country(ies) concerned worked in concert to achieve the same goal, within the framework of their existing mandates, lines of authority and funding arrangements.*

30. *The aim of such arrangements should be to:*

(a) *Ensure that the relevant programmes, funds and agencies were informed about the action the Secretary-General was taking to fulfil his political mandates and were invited to provide him with information and assessments relevant to his efforts;*

(b) *Inform them if in the Secretary-General's judgement, their existing activities needed to be harmonized with the overall political strategy;*

(c) *Identify in each case, benefiting from the expert advice of the appropriate programmes, funds and agencies, specific peace-building activities that could strengthen the Secretary-General's political effort, and could be initiated by them in accordance with their existing mandates, lines of authority and funding arrangements;*

(d) *Monitor the political efforts of the agreed activities, and keep under review, in consultation with the concerned programmes, funds and agencies, any adjustments that might be necessary.*

31. ACC members noted that in the course of the United Nations increased involvement in recent years in peace operations in the field, practices and procedures had developed that served the peace-building objective. ACC members considered that the arrangements that were envisaged in paragraphs 28 to 30 above, building on such practices, if properly understood and accepted, should prove adequate, obviating the need for new machinery for that purpose.

Peace-building for the prevention and resolution of crisis situations

32. Beyond the specific situations dealt with in paragraphs 26 to 31 above, ACC members called for concomitant, parallel and complementary actions by the United Nations system, in partnership with other actors, to assist country-level efforts for relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, as integral components of the system's overall effort to help secure durable peace and pursue or restore sustainable development in countries in crisis situations.

33. *ACC agreed that* relief and development programmes must overcome existing divisions that were reflected and reinforced by the existing separation of approaches, budgets and functions, and endorsed the recommendation of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) that, to that end, *a common strategic framework for response to and recovery from crisis, developed in consultation with the concerned authorities in countries and with the support of all concerned United Nations system organizations, was necessary. ACC endorsed the broad elements of such a strategic framework, concentrating on three primary components: analysis of in-country environment; setting of policy parameters; and the establishment of priorities for the response programme.* ACC noted that the formulation of such a framework should be flexible and pragmatic, and should not compromise the need for timeliness in the emergency/relief response. Implementation should be pursued through existing mechanisms, such as the resident and humanitarian coordinator systems, the common country assessment and the country strategy note, as well as other instruments, including those of the Bretton Woods institutions. It should rely on existing resource mobilization mechanisms.

34. ACC members acknowledged that in situations where the United Nations operated a political programme (see paras. 26 to 31 above), the strategic framework, in promoting a more integrated, coherent and unified approach to planning the response to the emergency and to facilitating recovery, should be applied in accordance with the arrangements outlined in paragraph 30 above. At the country level, the Secretary-General's Special Representative would, in such cases, have overall responsibility.

35. ACC members considered that the strategic framework, to be effective, must not only engage all partners in the United Nations system, as well as national authorities and other actors in the field, but should also clearly identify leadership responsibilities in each case, as well as the division of labour among the funds, programmes and agencies, and between headquarters and the field.

36. ACC recognized the need for mainstreaming a gender perspective in all activities undertaken by the United Nations system in the areas of peacekeeping, peace-building, reconciliation, reconstruction, rehabilitation and development.

Partnerships

37. *ACC* reaffirmed the importance of partnerships and alliances in crisis situations. It *agreed that consideration of new ways for United Nations system agencies and organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, to work together* in order to enhance the effectiveness of the international community's response to crisis situations *should increasingly encompass the effective participation of multilateral and bilateral donors and concerned international non-governmental organizations in the strategic framework for relief, rehabilitation and recovery.* New and more participatory approaches needed to be developed at the national as well as local levels in order to ensure ownership by the affected population of the recovery process and of the structures and institutions that needed to be preserved or rebuilt, as well as to reinforce sustainability. In addition to supporting the efforts of national authorities, the international partners also had a responsibility to be sensitive to and

respectful of the concerns of affected people at village and community levels, taking into account the particular problems faced by women, as well as the views of disenfranchised people.

Lessons learned

38. *ACC directed its Organizational Committee to pursue inter-agency consultations, including through IACSD, with a view to achieving, drawing on ongoing work both within and outside the system, a comprehensive assessment of the experience gained and lessons learned in recent years in peace-building in crisis situations.* One of the outcomes should be the identification of best practices and the further elaboration of guiding principles that could be applied by the United Nations system in future crises. Special attention should be given to ways of strengthening the overall capacity of the system for early warning and for assessing and exchanging information when a complex emergency situation appeared to be imminent.

Follow-up

39. *ACC endorsed the recommendation of CCPOQ that the proposed strategic framework for response to and recovery from crisis be tested in relation to two countries; Mozambique and Afghanistan were proposed in that regard.* The need to take the gender perspective into account in testing the strategic framework was emphasized.

40. *ACC also endorsed the recommendation that a working group be established for each selected country, inter alia, to develop arrangements for guiding and backstopping in-country application of the strategic framework.* The composition and methods of work of those groups, as proposed by CCPOQ,[1] would need to be reviewed in the light, inter alia, of the countries identified for that purpose. A proposal on the subject for consideration by ACC members would be circulated shortly by the United Nations.

41. *ACC decided to revert to the issue at a future session* in the light of the results achieved by the working groups and the review of lessons learned referred to in paragraph 38 above.

II. FOLLOW-UP, WITHIN THE SYSTEM, TO ACC INITIATIVES AND DECISIONS

A. Coordinated follow-up to international conferences

42. ACC reviewed progress in the inter-agency work under way to promote system-wide coordinated follow-up to international conferences through the three thematic ad hoc task forces and the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE), and also with respect to specific arrangements for the follow-up to the World Food Summit and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and their integration into coordinated follow-up. Concerning the World Food Summit, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) made available a background note describing arrangements jointly elaborated by FAO and the International

Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for follow-up at headquarters and country levels.

43. ACC was briefed by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and by the Executive Directors of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank and ILO on the work of the three task forces addressing the interrelated themes of basic social services for all, the enabling environment for social and economic development, and employment and sustainable livelihoods.

44. The representative of ILO indicated that the task force on employment and sustainable livelihoods had successfully completed its work and issued a synthesis report, which was made available to members of ACC. She stressed the usefulness of the country reviews that had been carried out in seven countries. The review of policies in those countries had brought out clearly the need to adapt country-level inter-agency cooperation to the variety of conditions and the extent of domestic capacity. Key areas for future support by the United Nations system had been identified at both the national and the global levels. Further positive action would depend on the progress made in the United Nations system in addressing international policy issues in a consistent and complementary manner.

45. The Executive Director of UNFPA reported on the completion of work of the Task Force on Basic Social Services for All, emphasizing the need for continued assessment of the implementation of its results. The wall chart prepared by the Task Force was made available to members of ACC. The representative of the World Bank also reported on developments in the work of the Task Force on the Enabling Environment for Economic and Social Development, indicating that the Task Force would complete its work by June 1997.

46. ACC members welcomed the progress made by the task forces, and noted the expected date for the completion of the work of the Task Force on the Enabling Environment for Economic and Social Development. *ACC decided to undertake, at its second regular session of 1997, a comprehensive assessment of overall progress to date in promoting the coordinated follow-up to conferences.*

47. As part of the review, ACC agreed to assess progress and requirements in relation to: (a) the effective utilization of the end products, including indicators, of the task forces; (b) regular updating and feedback on follow-up activities at the country level, focusing on the attainment of the goals established by the conferences; (c) the streamlining of reporting requirements and mechanisms, building on existing reporting and information arrangements, common country assessments, and the devices of task managers and lead organizations; and (d) the experience gained and lessons learnt from the use of flexible mechanisms, such as the task forces, for carrying out specific tasks under ACC.

48. *In that context, ACC endorsed the recommendation of CCPOQ to hold a workshop,[2] to be organized possibly in early September 1997, to (a) review the outputs of the task forces and other bodies, as well as arrangements to ensure coherence and inter-linkages among them, with particular reference to the guidance provided to the resident coordinator system; and (b) develop proposals*

for submission through CCPOQ to ACC at its second regular session of 1997 *on requirements for continued coordination and sustainability of the follow-up to the international conferences*. The need for further simplification and streamlining of meeting and reporting requirements should also be addressed in that context.

49. *ACC called on all organizations of the system to continue to give priority attention to the provision of effective support to the resident coordinator and the United Nations system country team, working with Governments, civil society organizations and others in pursuit of the goals and objectives agreed at those international conferences.*

50. *ACC endorsed the arrangements proposed for inter-agency follow-up to Habitat II and the World Food Summit,[3] which would focus especially on country-level action and coordinated headquarters' support for that action.*

51. *ACC requested IACWGE to complete the preparation of an advocacy statement on the mainstreaming of a gender perspective throughout the United Nations system.*

52. The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) informed ACC that WHO was currently engaged in renewing the strategy relating to achievement of Health for All by the year 2000, and would produce a new Health Charter, concerning which the Director-General intended to consult ACC at its next session. WHO would also observe its fiftieth anniversary in 1998. The Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) proposed that a brief report be prepared, for consideration at the next session of ACC, on the follow-up to the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction (Yokohama, Japan, 23-27 May 1997).

53. The Executive Director of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) briefed members of ACC on inter-agency preparations under way for the special session of the General Assembly on the combat against the illicit production, sale, demand, traffic and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and related activities, scheduled to take place in June 1998.

B. United Nations System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa

54. In introducing the item, the Secretary-General called on ACC members, in assessing the state of implementation of the United Nations System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa, to focus on the concrete impact of the Initiative at the country level. He expressed satisfaction that the relationship between the United Nations Special Initiative and the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) was being clarified, and that the role of the Initiative as an instrument to advance UN-NADAF was being established, as shown by the matrix submitted to ACC, which would need to be further refined. The Secretary-General stressed that much was at stake through the Special Initiative in terms of the credibility of the system and of its capacity, by pooling capabilities and resources, to achieve a real impact on

crucial needs that impinge on the world's overall prospects for peace and development.

55. The Administrator of UNDP, in his capacity as Co-Chair of the ACC Steering Committee of the Special Initiative, called attention to the substantial, measurable progress being made in relation to African ownership and country-level implementation of the Initiative. He made special reference in that context to the leadership being exercised by ministers of education and of health and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Conference in furthering collaborative strategy formulation and programme implementation in the areas of education, health and information, and in operationalizing the Special Initiative in those major priority areas. He also cited specific developments showing definite progress at the country level, and referred to sector investment programmes at various stages of planning in a large number of countries, such as Guinea, Mali, Malawi, Mauritius and Senegal in the field of education, and Ghana, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, the Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Zambia in the field of health. In addition, a number of African countries were preparing programmes for presentation at a forum on governance sponsored by ECA and UNDP, which was scheduled to take place in July at Addis Ababa.

56. United Nations resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, including the representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions, were holding or planning retreats, examining how best to collaborate within the framework of the United Nations Special Initiative. The first such retreat had taken place in Ethiopia in March 1997; two others were scheduled to be held in Ghana and Mozambique in late April 1997, and others were planned for Cape Verde, Congo and Zimbabwe later in 1997. Examples of best practices in inter-agency cooperation and collaboration, on the basis of those experiences, would be drawn up and disseminated.

57. The value of the retreats was becoming most evident from the level of resources being mobilized and the impetus being given to United Nations system and donor cooperation, in the context of the Special Initiative. The Administrator expressed appreciation for the collaboration extended and role played by the World Bank in those endeavours. The Steering Committee was currently examining a proposal for a common communication strategy to ensure that the positive messages emanating from the Special Initiative would become more widely known.

58. *ACC* members emphasized that the need to listen to Africans with respect to their priorities, was the only way to ensure sustained African ownership and leadership, and lasting progress at the country level. To the same ends, they *called for maximum use to be made of expertise available in Africa, and for diversified implementation strategies to ensure that each country's specific situation and priorities were addressed. Emphasis was also placed on the need for adequate investments in higher education and science and technology. It was further noted that the effectiveness of the United Nations Special Initiative would be best assured by focusing on the original priority programmes, maintaining realistic targets, and pursuing resource mobilization strategies that would emphasize and lead to additionality.*

59. *Satisfaction was expressed with respect to progress made in introducing a better articulation between UN-NADAF and the Special Initiative. ACC also stressed that linkages between the Special Initiative on Africa and other international development cooperation undertakings should be further pursued.* Those undertakings include the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, the Alliance for Africa's Industrialization, health programmes adopted by heads of State and Government, and programmes for skills improvement and the informal sector. *Closer linkages will also need to be established between the Special Initiative and ongoing ACC activities related to the coordinated follow-up to recent global conferences. There was also a need to accelerate progress in the priority area of poverty eradication, and to build the capacities of civil society organizations, including strengthening linkages with the private sector, as called for under the Special Initiative.*

60. It was recognized that the most cost-effective arrangements for United Nations system support to Africa required further consideration, and should continue to be given priority attention by ACC. The importance of ensuring that work under the Special Initiative proceeded within the time-frame originally established was underlined. In the same context, it was noted that the establishment of target dates for specific activities would greatly assist in ensuring effective evaluation and monitoring of progress, and the timely introduction of corrective measures to address constraints that might be encountered. The issue of harmonizing activities at United Nations Headquarters related to African development was also raised; it was noted that such harmonization would serve to enhance the coordinating role of the Secretary-General in that area. A suggestion was made that the Secretary-General consider using a small panel of high-level personalities to continue to promote the Initiative, especially with reference to debt relief and trade expansion.

61. *ACC reiterated its invitation to all concerned executive heads to issue appropriate instructions to their field representatives to participate fully and actively in the United Nations system country teams working to further the implementation of the Initiative in collaboration with Governments, the donor community and civil society. In so doing, it reiterated that the success of the Initiative would be determined by its concrete impact at the country level.*

62. *ACC also called on all executive heads to continue to contribute actively to political mobilization efforts in support of the Special Initiative within Africa and outside the continent.*

63. *ACC decided to maintain the item on its agenda for the immediate future* in order to (a) continue to monitor progress accomplished; (b) provide policy advice and leadership on corrective measures that might be needed; and (c) promote further substantive progress in relation to those components of the Special Initiative for which implementation strategies had not yet been completed or fully developed.

C. Universal access to basic communication and information services

64. Following an introductory statement by the Secretary-General, the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) reported to ACC on the outcome of the inter-agency project on universal access to basic communication and information services. The project had been launched within the framework of the ACC effort to promote an integrated follow-up to conferences, and was seen as supportive of the work of the three task forces established in that context by ACC, as well as other system-wide initiatives, such as the United Nations Special Initiative on Africa. A main outcome of the project had been to advance the concept of the right to communicate, and to establish that it had become essential to consider the extent to which rapid technological advances triggered the emergence of such a right.

65. ACC members expressed appreciation for the work undertaken, and for the timely completion of the project under the leadership of ITU. The project should be publicized as yet another good example of effective inter-agency collaboration.

66. *In reviewing the report on the project, ACC agreed that an integral element of the priority efforts of the United Nations system in pursuing the overarching goal of securing sustainable human development for all should be the promotion of access to basic communication and information services for all.*

67. ACC also noted that another important feature of the project was to reinforce the common efforts of the organizations of the United Nations system to harmonize and coordinate their strategies for modernizing and enhancing capacities and effectiveness in the use of information and communication technologies. In particular, the creation of a United Nations system-wide Intranet would facilitate inter-agency cooperation and effective integration of the competencies of all concerned organizations in support of country-level action. *ACC considered that ensuring the compatibility, accessibility and convergence of communications and computer-based systems among organizations of the United Nations system was crucial in that regard.*

68. In the same context, the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management of the United Nations Secretariat urged United Nations system organizations to develop a coordinated approach to the utilization of the Integrated Management Information system project.

69. *ACC requested its Information Systems Coordination Committee to undertake, within its terms of reference, the necessary follow-up action for the implementation of relevant aspects of the project.*

70. *ACC adopted a statement on universal access to basic communication and information services, which is contained in annex I, and invited the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of ACC to bring the statement to the attention of the General Assembly with a view to seeking its endorsement. ACC members, for their part, agreed to consider submitting the statement to their respective governing bodies, as deemed appropriate.*

D. The Graça Machel study: impact of armed conflict on children

71. Following an introductory statement by the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) briefed ACC on the expert study on the impact of armed conflict on children. She stressed that the report emanating from the study was the most far-reaching human rights appraisal of children affected by armed conflict ever debated by the United Nations General Assembly, and drew the attention of ACC members to the recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 51/77, which had been adopted unanimously.

72. *ACC members* welcomed the study prepared by the expert, which addressed a very topical and crucial subject, and *agreed to commit their organizations to working, within their respective mandates, for the effective and timely implementation of the recommendations contained in Assembly resolution 51/77, giving special attention to coordinating actions and achieving concrete results at the country level. United Nations system country teams and field personnel and the staff of humanitarian relief operations were called upon to accord priority attention to children affected by armed conflict.*

73. *ACC requested its subsidiary machinery, in particular CCPOQ in the context of its ongoing work on post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction, to develop ways to link child-related rehabilitation and development activities with relief and recovery, and to ensure that all relevant guidelines, appeals and strategy proposals reflected the specific needs of war-affected children.*

74. *ACC also requested that the relevant recommendations of the study be integrated, to the extent possible, into ongoing activities related to the follow-up to recent international conferences, and that the issues dealt with in the expert report be pursued as part of the peace-building, conflict-resolution and national reconciliation activities of the United Nations Special Initiative on Africa.*

75. *ACC also called on concerned organizations within the United Nations system to develop inter-agency guidelines for activities related to conflict-affected children for the guidance of resident coordinators, humanitarian coordinators and other concerned officials, such as the special representatives of the Secretary-General.*

76. *ACC requested its member organizations to give special attention to the needs and rights of street children and refugee and internally displaced children, and to strengthen, within their respective work programmes, activities that relate to the promotion and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

77. *ACC decided to keep under review, through its appropriate subsidiary bodies, the follow-up actions to be undertaken in the area.*

III. OTHER MATTERS

A. Administrative questions

78. During the consideration of the item, ACC heard statements from the representatives of the Coordinating Committee for Independent Staff Unions and Association and the Federation of International Civil Servants' Association, focusing, inter alia, on issues related to the security of international civil servants; salary survey methodology; the consideration by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) of a proposal to introduce a single post adjustment for Geneva-based staff, based on prices not only in Geneva but also in the border areas in France; and the United Nations Code of Conduct.

79. ACC was briefed by the Chairman of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Personnel Questions) (CCAQ(PER)) on developments in the General Assembly, in response to the ACC statement on conditions of service. ACC noted in particular that the General Assembly had not reached a conclusion on the implications for the common system of the finding of ICSC that the German civil service was better paid than the current comparator.

80. *ACC members reiterated their views on the need to substantially improve conditions of service for staff, and invited the Secretary-General to continue to seek a favourable solution to that issue with Member States in the General Assembly.*

81. The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), recalling his previously stated position with regard to condition of service and the functioning of ICSC, informed ACC that he would no longer automatically implement decisions of ICSC without the required prior consultation. He also reiterated his call for reforms in the common system and in the functioning of ICSC, and invited other members of ACC to support the UNESCO position. While recognizing the importance of the staff for all organizations, he considered that compensation should be based on merit and not on routine procedures and rules.

82. The Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management of the United Nations Secretariat cautioned members of ACC against having disparate levels of compensation in the light of implications for the common system. He considered that ACC should continue to urge ICSC to be more innovative in its proposals for compensation, including the development of a pay for performance compensation system.

83. *ACC once again urged ICSC to ensure that arrangements be made to facilitate the resumption of staff participation in the work of the Commission.*

84. Regarding the code of conduct being developed by the United Nations, ACC members reiterated their interest in the exercise, since the code, once adopted, could have implications for the international civil service in the common system. The Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, while confirming that the code of conduct being developed was applicable only to the United Nations, assured ACC members that the draft, once completed, would be shared with them.

85. Regarding the budgets of jointly financed bodies, which had been reviewed by the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Financial and Budgetary Questions) (CCAQ(FB)), the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management briefed ACC on the process of establishing the proposed programme budgets of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and ICSC for the 1998-1999 biennium, confirming that both bodies had been requested to observe zero real growth. Although the budget proposals submitted by ICSC had met that target, the budget proposed by JIU was in excess of the target. Consultations were under way between his Department and the secretariat of JIU in order to submit a zero real growth budget for JIU to the General Assembly.

86. With respect to the decisions taken by ACC at its second regular session of 1996 concerning the functioning of JIU, the Under-Secretary-General explained that he had conveyed the Committee's conclusions to the President of the General Assembly, including the recommendations that the Assembly launch an external review of the functioning of JIU, and also raising the possibility of postponing, in the meantime, elections to forthcoming vacancies. By then, the General Assembly had already invited five countries to put forward candidates for five forthcoming vacancies, and a postponement of those elections had not therefore proved feasible. The proposal for an external review of the functioning of JIU had not yet been addressed by the General Assembly but was being actively pursued; an eventual reduction in the number of the inspectors comprising JIU thus remained a possibility.

87. The Director-General of UNESCO informed ACC of his intention to reduce significantly his organization's financial contribution to the budget of JIU and ICSC in the programme and budget proposals for the next biennium.

88. *ACC reiterated the need for an independent review of JIU, as well as its earlier request that its conclusions on the level of the JIU budget be reflected in the budget estimates to be presented to the General Assembly in the context of the United Nations programme budget submission for 1998-1999.*

B. Other issues

Meeting of ACC subsidiary bodies

89. ACC noted the following programme of meetings:

IACSD	Geneva (hosted by WHO)	Week of 15 September 1997
CCPOQ	New York	22 and 26 September 1997
CCAQ(FB)	New York	25-29 August 1997

Future meetings of ACC

90. *ACC decided that its second regular session of 1997 would be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 31 October and 1 November 1997.*

Other matters

91. ACC noted the request of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that ACC consider, at its second regular session of 1997, United Nations policies on staff security and stress. ACC also noted the suggestion by the Executive Director of UNICEF that ACC undertake, at its next session, a review of standing items on its agenda with a view to assessing their continuing relevance.

92. Since the term of office of the Secretary General of the International Civil Aviation Organization would be coming to an end before the next meeting of ACC, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, on behalf of ACC members, thanked Mr. Philippe Rochat for his contribution to the work of ACC and to progress in the field of civil aviation, and conveyed to him ACC's best wishes in his future endeavours.

Notes

[i] CCPOQ recommended that the working groups draw upon members of CCPOQ and IACSD, as well as key donor organizations, and include all organizations with significant involvement in the selected countries. The groups would formulate recommendations on the leadership of the application process; clarify issues, as necessary, to facilitate practical application of the approach, in consultation with in-country representatives; develop a work programme, set milestones and consider resource requirements; and develop arrangements for guiding and backstopping in-country application of the strategic framework.

[j] Participation in the workshop would include the chairpersons of the task forces and of the relevant ACC subsidiary mechanisms (IACSD, CCPOQ, IACWGE, the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities etc.), selected lead agencies and selected resident coordinators. Participation of agencies that do not have representatives at the national level should also be considered.

[k] Under those arrangements, thematic groups covering food security and related issues would be constituted at the country level, within the resident coordinator system. At headquarters, FAO would assume responsibility for overall operation of a network of interested organizations, including also non-United Nations actors, to backstop those country-level groups and promote common approaches; IFAD would manage a monitoring and evaluation component, inter alia, to collect, analyse and disseminate selected country experiences. Reporting to ACC would occur, as appropriate, through CCPOQ or through IACSD. Its outputs would also be made available to other mechanisms within or outside the ACC machinery.

Annex I

ACC STATEMENT ON UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO BASIC COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SERVICES

1. The world is in the midst of a communication and information revolution, complemented by an explosive growth in knowledge. Information and knowledge have become a factor sui generis in societal and economic development, as generic technologies, information and communication technologies (ICT) permeate and cut across all areas of economic, social, cultural and political activity. In the process, they affect all social institutions, perceptions and thought processes. Globally, the information and communication sector is already expanding at twice the rate of the world economy. Decreasing costs of increasingly powerful, reliable hardware and software, as well as the fact that much hardware has become a desktop item, will continue to drive the use of information and communication technologies, facilitating access by ever wider segments of society. But that tendency can have profound benefits only if gains in physical access are accompanied by capacities to exploit those technologies for individual and societal development through the production and dissemination of appropriate content and applications.

2. The communication and information revolution opens up entirely new vistas for the organizations of the United Nations system; it will bring about a dramatic shift not only in the way our organizations will operate in the future, deliver services and products, but also in the way they collaborate and interact with each other and other actors. Indeed, the multilateral system as a whole - specifically development cooperation - has reached a threshold at which our future orientations, strategies and activities must be revisited and adjusted to the new circumstances and opportunities. We are resolved to respond readily and effectively to those new challenges.

3. We recognize that knowledge and information:

(a) Represent the lifeblood of the emerging global information society and its attendant infrastructure;

(b) Are the principal resources of the burgeoning information economy;

(c) Are at the heart of the intensifying globalization trends, and drive the emergence of a tele-economy with new global and societal organizational models (telework, telecommuting, teleservices, telemedicine, distance education, teletraining, teleshopping, telebanking, business facilitation, trade efficiency, trade information etc.). In many instances, physical location is becoming irrelevant for the ability to receive or deliver products and services;

(d) Will increasingly affect the international division of labour, will determine the competitiveness of corporations and national economies, and will generate new growth patterns and paradigms;

(e) Will have strategic consequences for the global power constellation. Knowledge, more than ever, is power. Information about what is occurring

becomes a central commodity of international relations, and determines the efficiency and effectiveness of any intervention, which is a particular challenge for multilateral actors.

4. Information is not a free good. Comparative advantages will henceforth be expressed in the ability of countries to acquire, organize, retrieve and disseminate information through communication, information-processing technologies and complex information networks to support policy-making and the development process. Abilities in those areas may allow the prevention and resolution of regional and other conflicts, or may deal with new challenges, such as international crime, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and environmental damage, by charting better informed decisions, all of which are of utmost concern to the organizations of the United Nations system.

5. We are profoundly concerned at the increasingly inadequate distribution of access, resources and opportunities in the information and communication field. The information and technology gap and related inequities between industrialized and developing nations are widening, so that a new type of poverty - information poverty - is being created. Most developing countries, especially the least developed countries, are not sharing in the communication revolution, since they lack:

(a) Affordable access to core information resources, cutting-edge technology and to sophisticated telecommunication systems and infrastructure;

(b) The capacity to build, operate, manage, and service the technologies involved;

(c) Policies that promote equitable public participation in the information society as both producers and consumers of information and knowledge; and

(d) A workforce trained to develop, maintain and provide the value-added products and services required by the information economy.

We therefore commit the organizations of the United Nations system to assist developing countries in redressing the present alarming trends.

6. Over the past decades, the organizations of the United Nations system have carried out many projects, at various levels, incorporating communication and information technologies. However, today we must acknowledge that such projects were often undertaken in a rather uncoordinated manner. We therefore perceive an urgent need for a more strategic and systematic approach to ICT and information management, based on a strengthened collaboration among the organizations of the United Nations system.

7. We have concluded that the introduction and use of ICTs and information management must become an integral element of the priority efforts by the United Nations system to promote and secure sustainable human development for all; hence our decision to embrace the objective of establishing universal access to basic communication and information services for all. ICTs and effective

information management offer hitherto unknown possibilities and modalities for the solution of global problems to help fulfil social development goals and to build capacities to effectively use the new technologies. At the same time, infrastructure and services of physical communication, in particular postal services, are a means of communication widely and universally used throughout the world, particularly in developing countries. Postal services are vital and for the foreseeable future, will remain essential to promoting trade, industry and services of all kinds. Indeed, the value of postal services will be further enhanced as new services, such as hybrid mail - combining electronic transmission and physical delivery - gain ground.

8. Individually and jointly, our organizations are already carrying out or are planning at the national level to embark on various projects and activities to highlight the catalytic role that multilateral organizations can and must play in this increasingly vital area. We pledge to do more by joining forces in a variety of fields, such as agriculture, education, health, natural resources and environment management, transport, international trade and commerce, employment and labour issues, housing, infrastructure and community services, small and medium enterprise development, and strengthening of participatory arrangements (see appendix). It is our intention and determination to demonstrate the viability and suitability of the new technologies and effective information management - especially by reaching out to and targeting the rural areas and most impoverished segments of society so often bypassed by the benefits of technological progress. Unless we are able to show that ICTs make a difference and reach out to more poor people or deliver better services to larger segments of society, the potential of ICTs and information management will remain unrealized.

9. Harnessing and spreading the potential of the new communication technologies to countries, especially in the developing world, in a timely, cost-effective and equitable manner will be a daunting challenge. The telecommunication infrastructure is weak in virtually all developing countries. The 59 lowest income countries (which account for about 56 per cent of the world's population) share only 7 per cent of the world's telephone mainlines. Excluding China and India, the 57 lowest income countries (which together account for one fifth of the world's population) have one hundredth of the global telephone mainlines. Wherever there is connectivity, it is limited to major cities, the waiting lists are long and there is no indication that the situation will improve dramatically soon. Within the limits of its resources and priorities, the United Nations system stands ready to assist Governments in designing national policies, plans and strategies to facilitate and guide the development and management of an appropriate national information infrastructure, in accordance with their needs and traditions.

10. ICTs hold the prospect of an accelerated introduction of certain state-of-the-art technologies, superseding the step-by-step process of transferring know-how and technologies that has dominated industrialization processes. Successful leapfrogging will allow developing countries to advance, bypassing stages of technology development. Although aware of the considerable practical hurdles, we are nevertheless determined to assist our developing country partners in that quest.

11. We are equally conscious of the imperative to build human and technical capacities to enable societies to facilitate access and make best use of the new multimedia communication resources. The rapid expansion of the Internet and its interactive character have introduced a dramatic paradigm shift in the retrieval, handling and dissemination of information. Such technologies make it possible for those who need information and knowledge to look for it on an electronic network and download what they need when they need it. The explosion of the Internet and the World Wide Web have created an easy-to-use communication interface for linking together computers in every part of the world for communications, information and data exchange - for those who can afford it.

12. The emphasis on such networks as the Internet, however, should not distract from the potential role and contribution other ICTs can make in advancing sustainable human development. Advances in CD-ROM technology, for example, have made multimedia and large-scale data transfers accessible to developing countries, even in areas where there is no telecommunication connectivity. Many of the multimedia options - especially the Internet - depend on the availability of reliable, powerful telecommunication connections with a sufficient bandwidth, as well as access to electricity grids or renewable energy, such as solar power, which are other limiting factors in the poorest areas. Widespread illiteracy, diverse cultures and linguistic differences pose additional obstacles for the introduction of new technologies on a universal basis.

13. Massive investment in telecommunication networks worldwide has helped to link most developing countries to international telecommunication networks, albeit in most cases only their capital cities. To date that connectivity invariably bypasses rural areas and hinterlands of developing countries, where the incidence of poverty is highest. We believe, therefore, that the expansion of domestic telecommunication infrastructure to rural areas and its connection to reliable international networks must become a top priority for Governments, the private sector and multilateral and bilateral development organizations. Unless telecommunication systems can be expanded, access will be confined to an urban, literate elite in developing countries, bypassing rural areas and the poor. Here, rapidly emerging digital satellite systems offer new solutions.

14. One indication of the magnitude of investment required is the estimate that in sub-Saharan Africa, raising teledensity to 1 telephone mainline per 100 inhabitants (from the current 0.46 mainlines per 100 inhabitants) would require an investment of US$ 8 billion. The estimate assumes, however, that the cost of a mainline closely mirrors prevailing international prices, whereas experience shows that typically the cost tends to be about three times higher in sub-Saharan Africa. The enormity and scale of the challenge to provide universal access in basic communication and information services to the developing world would thus make it advisable to focus on the community level and on reinforcing major development missions, such as education, rather than the household or individual level. Even so, harnessing and spreading the potential of the new information and communication technologies to developing countries will be a daunting challenge.

15. The organizations of the United Nations system alone cannot undertake such a massive and exceedingly costly investment, which will help to alleviate poverty, create new livelihoods and open up new markets. We call upon the

private sector, Governments, civil society and other development organizations to engage with us in a purposeful and systematic endeavour to shape and manage this process by:

(a) Establishing and promoting a common global vision and broad-based awareness of the changes taking place, and articulating a compelling vision and strategy of how new technologies can be made to benefit all countries, particularly the poorest;

(b) Building national human, technical and economic capacities to facilitate access to and utilization of ICTs in developing countries;

(c) Promoting multimedia ICTs in the delivery of programmes advancing sustainable human development, especially to rural areas;

(d) Promoting, with the participation of the private sector, the creation, management and dissemination of strategic information and data pertaining to the various dimensions of development - globally, regionally and nationally and at the community level.

16. We are conscious of the fact that modern communication links - especially Web-based approaches - will have a material impact on programmes, programme content, modalities and quality of delivery, and hence on the future of multilateral cooperation and technical assistance per se. For our part, we will accelerate our ongoing internal reform and change processes to create modern, cost-effective and globally networked organizations, involving a strengthening of our in-house technical capacities and changing staff attitudes and perceptions, especially among senior managers. Another objective will be to strengthen ties and intensify communication among our remote offices, opening up opportunities for decentralization and for an instantaneous presence of technical back-up and support.

17. In addition, we intend to harmonize and coordinate our strategies for modernizing and enhancing capacities and effectiveness. The objective will be to create a United Nations system-wide "Intranet" (Internet for internal usage) to facilitate cooperation among the organizations and ensure the integrated exploitation of the competencies of organizations and coordination at national level. We shall seek to promote cooperation among our respective organizations through the use of compatible systems, which we already pursue through the separate mechanism of the Information Systems Coordination Committee. We aim to ensure the compatibility, accessibility and convergence of communications and computer-based systems.

18. All this must be complemented by constantly updated and well managed Web sites for each of our organizations offering hyperlinks to relevant Web sites both within and outside the United Nations system. This will confer competence and global authority to our organizations in the electronic age. Indeed, as assessing reliability becomes difficult, with more than 65 million Web pages on the Internet, the entities of the United Nations system should become Web focal points, each in their area of competence. We must strive to make our Web sites the foremost entry points for information on poverty, development and sustainability, and universal human values and heritage. The Information

Systems Coordination Committee, which was established in 1994 with the intent of harmonizing approaches of United Nations organizations and facilitating access to United Nations related information, has made a good start.

19. We also need to explore and comprehend the implications and potential of the ICT era. Do rapid technological advances trigger the emergence of a right to communicate and a right to access information? What are the consequences for the global labour market, including the gender impact and the role of trade unions, and the international division of labour; the prospects for access to global markets for goods, products and services from developing country economies; opportunities for global sourcing; the scope for participatory approaches involving youth, local and community groups, women and indigenous organizations, and other disenfranchised groups; the impact on the elderly; the consequences for traditional postal services; the dimensions of international copyright and trade in services?

20. At present, innovation in terms of ICT technology choices, approaches and content responds by and large to the needs and perceptions of industrialized countries and their business sector. We suggest that innovations for both hardware and software must also become demand-driven and needs-driven so as to respond to development objectives and needs. Such a shift from supply-driven to needs-driven approaches must become a global priority, and must influence the direction and pace of future innovation. Only then can ICT take hold and make a significant impact in developing countries, which are after all the markets of the future. Among other things, this will require the design of products suitable for use in electricity-poor environments (including hardware independent from electric power, such as solar-based or crank-technology driven hardware) and for use by illiterate people (facilitating accessibility through iconographic software, and culturally and linguistically diverse content). But partnership and alliances will be driven both by technical and financial realities.

21. Thus, we are particularly concerned by the staggering financial needs required to narrow the present gap between information haves and have-nots. A scarcity of funds and insufficient investment flows inevitably hamper the modernization of telecommunication networks and the introduction of promising technologies for advancing sustainable human development. As official development assistance flows are not projected to increase dramatically over the next few years, we must stimulate innovative approaches to raise a critical mass of resources.

22. In our view, the sheer magnitude of the task will necessitate the urgent formation of new and novel cooperative mechanisms:

(a) Industry alliances linking developed and developing countries;

(b) Collaborative partnerships across traditional lines - between the Government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, foundations, academic entities, actors of civil society, and intergovernmental and international organizations.

23. We, the heads of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, have agreed to pursue cooperatively and in a more systematic manner the development of strategic approaches to the broad issues of the global information economy and society; therefore, we have agreed to commit ourselves to improving universal access to basic communication and information services.

24. In order to demonstrate our ability to bridge the information gap, we have agreed to undertake, through coordinated action at the country level, pilot projects in the broad areas indicated in the appendix.

25. The involvement of Member States is essential in responding to the challenges of change. We therefore invite the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, to bring the present statement to the attention of the General Assembly with a view to seeking its endorsement. Executive heads will also submit the statement to their respective governing bodies.

Appendix

INDICATIVE AREAS FOR POSSIBLE PILOT PROJECTS

1. Interactive long-distance education and learning: conventional teaching and learning methods are increasingly unable to respond to the rising demand for learning, driven by burgeoning illiteracy, a dearth of well qualified teachers and faculty, shrinking public funds for the education sector, and the growing acceptance of the concept of lifelong learning in a world driven by rapid change. At all levels of the educational process, long-distance education can become a viable complement to conventional schooling and training, in particular reaching out and delivering education services to isolated countries and regions, which often are the poorest. Where even television may prove to be unaffordable, one must rely on radio and the development of community-based media, especially rural radio.

2. Telemedicine: telemedicine comprises opportunities for medical practice and education through the combination of telecommunication and medical technologies. Telemedicine allows interactive audiovisual communication between physician and practitioner in distant locations, facilitates the exchange of medical information for research and educational purposes, and enables diagnostic imaging and clinical analysis from a distance to compensate for a lack of specialists or dispense advice to doctors. Electronic means may thus help to improve the quality and delivery of health and reproductive services to rural areas. Access to computer and telecommunication services can help to transform the role of health workers, and to enhance the quality and outreach of health services and preventive health care in underserviced rural communities.

3. Telebanking and micro-credit schemes: telebanking can assist banks in adjusting to the needs of the poor, communicating with the illiterate and poor at the village level and promoting micro-credit schemes. The available technology is tailor-made for a market characterized by a vast, impoverished and mostly illiterate rural population, high crime and widespread fraud.

4. Environmental protection and management: environmental protection and management is a wide field for various applications of information technologies, including sustainable forestry and logging practices, waste management and disposal, support to agricultural extension services, water resource management, managing irrigation and natural resource exploitation.

5. Participatory processes, arrangements and good governance: communications is not only a means to disseminate knowledge, information and values, it is also a basic component of all democratic societies. Its instantaneous character is bound to affect decision-making in the political, economic and business spheres. It will also have an impact on democratic (or autocratic) systems and governance structures, affecting their responsiveness, transparency and accountability, and will strengthen participatory and people-centred approaches within civil society, empowering especially women and youth. The technology is suitable for creating novel structures at the community level to manage individual and public affairs by all stakeholders in sustainable development and for empowering those

most affected by poverty by providing broad-based access to information and partners.

6. Virtual laboratories for solving development problems: new methods of work which were still unthinkable just a year ago are now possible. By combining the Internet, virtual reality, real time 3D computing, other telecommunications technologies, groupware and virtual team work, it is now possible to create permanent "invisible colleges" of scientists working on critical research subjects, at relatively little cost. The principal objective is to link researchers with the special needs and knowledge of the developing countries to the infrastructure and practices already firmly established in the developed countries in order to provide access to scientific know-how and information more quickly, on a larger scale and in an interactive format, allowing for the most rapid dissemination of such information. Those techniques are one solution to the South-North brain drain, which would allow scientists from the South to be associated virtually in all key discussions taking place in the world research community.

7. Universal access to world's knowledge and culture: public information institutions, which are a natural focus for access to the information needed for development, have not been able to exploit their potential to the full in developing countries due to the immensity of the needs involved and scarcity of resources. Information and communication technologies provide such institutions with a means to promote cost-effective, development-oriented information services for all sectors of society, building on networking at the national and regional levels. Of particular importance is public domain information that the information market seems to neglect, for different reasons: insufficient potential profitability, small readership, or - more paradoxically - the public nature of the original data. Such information should be inventoried, digitized and accessed with Internet servers, with the support of appropriate public policies on copyright issues related to information technologies, the development of electronic cultural industries and the promotion of the Internet as a public utility accessible to all at the lowest possible cost.

Annex II

EXCERPTS FROM THE DRAFT PROVISIONAL AGENDA: ANNOTATIONS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Item 2 (a) (Strengthening and reform of the United Nations system)*

Background

1. ACC carried out at its second regular session of 1996 a wide-ranging review of the direction of ongoing reform processes in the United Nations system and their implications for the strengthening of the system in the context of current developments affecting international cooperation and development.

2. ACC reviewed at that time the state of play of discussions on reform in different groups and intergovernmental bodies. A common thrust that had emerged from those discussions was a perceived need for the various organizations of the United Nations system to concentrate on their core areas of competence, while at the same time strengthening joint and collaborative actions. This was viewed as the way to maximize cost-effectiveness within the system while at the same time enhancing the collective capacity of United Nations organizations to address in an integrated manner the growing number of interrelated global issues requiring comprehensive solutions. That message was largely in line with the approaches that had increasingly been guiding the work of ACC, and with the renewed emphasis placed by ACC on a clear delineation of responsibilities within the United Nations system on the one hand, and the launching of specific joint initiatives that were result-oriented and time-bound on the other. The question was also raised of the feasibility of complementing those inter-agency initiatives by arrangements that would provide for more systematic prior consultations on policy and programme initiatives, as well as on the proposed work programmes of individual organizations, with a view to avoiding unnecessary overlaps, identifying gaps, and facilitating closer collaboration and complementarity of actions at the implementation stage, once the relevant programme budgets had been approved by the respective governing bodies.

3. The ACC joint statement recalled that the organizations of the system were actively engaged in management reforms and other organizational change. ACC decided to exchange information and experience on those processes, noting that that should help to ensure that those processes were mutually supportive, that implications for other organizations had been identified and taken into account, and that best practices had been institutionalized and drawn upon system-wide.

Secretary-General's reform initiative and its inter-agency implications

4. Most recently, the Secretary-General shared with members of ACC, before making it public, a letter he had addressed to the President of the General Assembly, setting out an initial set of reform measures that he had decided to introduce in the Organization, and outlining further phases in the United Nations reform process. In the letter, the Secretary-General indicated that **the United Nations reform agenda is being implemented on the basis of a two-track process**. The first track is related to those managerial initiatives and other

decisions that fall within the Secretary-General's authority and can be taken immediately. The second track involves the preparation of a longer-term programme of reform, which will incorporate (a) further measures within the authority of the Secretary-General, including those that he believes should be subject to consultations with and guidance from Member States; and (b) his proposals in respect of more fundamental issues, which can only be decided by Member States.

5. The reform measures included in the first track cover the transfer of resources from administration to programmes; the consolidation of departments in the economic and social fields; the streamlining and strengthening of services for intergovernmental processes; the reorientation of public information; the streamlining and consolidation of administrative, financial, personnel, procurement and other services; the presence of the United Nations at the country level; the finalization of a United Nations code of conduct; the reduction of documentation; as well as budget and staffing levels. The Secretary-General concludes in his letter that reform is not an end in itself. It is a means to achieve a more effective United Nations system that better serves the Member States; a leaner and more efficient United Nations Secretariat, including the funds and programmes, with simplified structures, that avoids duplication and achieves greater impact; and a United Nations Organization that is well managed and more accountable for results.

6. **The approaches to reform embodied in the Secretary-General's communication to the President of the General Assembly, although focusing on the United Nations itself, are of system-wide interest**. Elements of special interest include the definition of the objectives of reform; the adoption of a two-track process that distinguishes between, on the one hand, measures within the authority of the Secretary-General, and, on the other, measures that require action by Member States but in relation to which the Secretary-General will put forward his vision and specific proposals; and the setting of specific targets against which progress in reform can be assessed. **A number of the measures included in the first track**, including those related to the presence of United Nations funds and programmes at the country level and the consolidation of United Nations departments in the economic and social field into a single Headquarters Department, **have direct or indirect inter-agency implications**. Thus, for example, the reforms introduced at the country level will have an impact on the functioning of the resident coordinator system, and the new arrangements at United Nations Headquarters will affect the Organization's interactions with the specialized agencies in the economic and social area. The scope of the exercise, which encompasses not only the central Secretariat but also United Nations programmes and funds, and the Secretary-General's decision to establish executive committees covering the four sectoral areas of the work of the Organization (peace and security; humanitarian affairs; economic and social affairs; and development operations), are also relevant in that context: by promoting concerted and coordinated management of overall United Nations activities, the process is expected to facilitate greater coherence system-wide. Those considerations apply with even greater force to **the second track of the process, which will lead to a comprehensive submission to the General Assembly at its next session:** by, inter alia, covering the functioning and structures of central intergovernmental bodies that have inter-agency responsibilities and the

overall place of the United Nations in the system, the second track **will have definite system-wide implications**.

7. ***ACC may wish to have an exchange of views on the implications of the above-mentioned measures, and may wish to discuss ways in which the organizations of the system can best contribute to the success of the overall reform process.***

Exchange of experience in reforms in the system

8. In the joint statement adopted at the second regular session of 1996 of ACC, the executive heads reiterated their individual and collective commitment to reform. It is increasingly important that the organizations of the system proceed and be seen to proceed, in concert to advance the reform process. The effort initiated in 1996 to exchange information and share experience on managerial and other reforms in order to make the reform processes under way mutually supportive and draw on each other's experiences and best practices, should be reinforced and made more systematic. In that regard, **an interactive process by electronic means should be developed to facilitate a continuous exchange of information on reform measures within the system**. **Monitoring and reporting on reforms, particularly their impact on programme delivery, also need to be improved**. **It is in relation to their effects on the strengthening of actual programme delivery that the success of reform measures should be assessed**. The development of a common understanding of reform-related terminology may also require renewed attention in the period ahead.

9. ***ACC may wish to direct its relevant consultative committees to give priority to the above tasks, and may wish to request its Organizational Committee to work out appropriate modalities of implementation.***

10. In accordance with a decision taken by ACC at its last session, work has been initiated for the compilation of a synthesis report on reform measures under way within the system. In view of rapid developments taking place in the various organizations, it has proved difficult to set an appropriate timing for the finalization and issuance of such a report. It would seem important that the first issue of such report be comprehensive, although it should of course be updated from time to time. In the light of the timetable adopted for the United Nations reform process and relevant developments in other organizations of the system, ***ACC may wish to determine an appropriate timing for the issuance of the first report on reform processes in the system. One possibility might be to complete the report in time for the second regular session of 1997 of ACC so that it would be available during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.***

System-wide reform and the functioning of ACC

11. Member States expect that the reform process will go beyond reforms in individual organizations to encompass the functioning and structures of the system as a whole. The overall structures of the system are, of course, the result of deliberate and discrete decisions by Governments. Within the parameters set by those decisions, **there is considerable scope for measures that can contribute to further rationalizing the division of labour within the system and enhancing the system's impact and image**. In particular, **the strengthening**

of the capacity of ACC to guide, at the executive level, the process of modernizing and adapting the system to the new political, economic and social environment, and enabling it to address the new challenges, facing it in a responsive and cost-effective way, **is crucial to meeting expectations as to the reform of the system**.

12. Constant progress has been made in recent years to enhance the relevance of the agenda and work of ACC to the key policy and operational concerns of the organizations of the system. As a result, ACC has undertaken important joint initiatives - from the Special Initiative on Africa to the integrated follow-up to global conferences - that have significant operational implications and are having a direct impact on the system's ability to extend concerted policy advice to Member States, and to ensure that the operational support provided to them benefits from the complementary and diverse capacities available throughout the system. The ACC subsidiary machinery has been streamlined, and further measures to modernize and improve its functioning are currently being introduced (a report on such measures in the light of ongoing reviews in the ACC consultative and inter-agency committees and the experience with the functioning of the ACC task forces on the follow-up to global conferences, and taking into account the outcome of the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on the review of the implementation of Agenda 21, will be submitted to ACC for its consideration at its second regular session of 1997).

13. **There is a need**, building on those improvements, **to further enhance the impact of the work of ACC on intergovernmental deliberations** - both the central intergovernmental bodies and the governing bodies of individual organizations. **Further progress also needs to be made to ensure that the work of ACC** does not remain superficially superimposed on the day-to-day activities of its member organizations but **has a direct impact on policy and programme development in individual organizations within the system**.

14. With regard to ACC interaction with intergovernmental bodies, ACC conclusions at its second regular session of 1996 provided that the Committee play a lead role, inter alia, by helping to clarify, from a system-wide perspective, the issues that need to be addressed at the intergovernmental level. This applies to both substantive issues and administrative questions coming within the purview of those bodies. **A more proactive role by ACC vis-à-vis intergovernmental bodies, particularly the central intergovernmental organs in the United Nations, implies changes in the modalities and timing of its reporting**. Such a role cannot substitute for improved coordination at the national level among the ministries that set the programmes of different United Nations organizations in their respective governing bodies. It could, however, serve to facilitate such coordination. To the same ends, the feasibility of more direct interactions among the governing bodies and between them and the central intergovernmental bodies might also be explored. The proposals for the reform of the central intergovernmental machinery to be put forward by the Secretary-General in the context of his "track two" reform proposals might take some of those possibilities into account.

15. **With regard to measures that could serve to enhance the impact of ACC deliberations on individual organizations within the system, the following would appear to deserve further consideration and/or action:**

(a) **The organization, through the appropriate ACC subsidiary bodies and other means, of more systematic prior consultations on new policy and programme initiatives and on proposed work programmes**, prior to their adoption by the relevant governing bodies, in line with the principles adopted by ACC in 1993;

(b) **The organization within the framework of ACC of subject-oriented consultations involving the executive heads most directly concerned with the subject under discussion**. Experience within the United Nations itself with the work of the executive committees will be relevant in that context;

(c) **The extension of the system of task managers, being applied, inter alia, in the field of sustainable development, to other areas of the system's work**. The experience of the United Nations in introducing an issue management system as anticipated in the Secretary-General's letter to the President of the General Assembly, will be relevant in that context;

(d) **The strengthening of substantive secretariat services for ACC**, including the feasibility of integrated inter-agency secretariat support, drawing on the relevant services in New York, the capacities available in the jointly financed secretariats of ACC subsidiary bodies (now co-located at Geneva) and relevant expertise in the specialized agencies with a view to:

(i) Ensuring that preparations for the work of ACC and its subsidiary machinery benefit from in-depth knowledge of developments and concerns in the organizations of the system;

(ii) Enhancing the capacity of ACC to monitor the implementation of its decisions throughout the system;

(e) **Measures to ensure more systematic feedbacks and linkages between field operations and coordination arrangements at the headquarters' level**;

(f) **Reorientation of the work programmes and agendas of the standing committees of ACC** towards the objectives identified above;

(g) **Continuous monitoring of the work programme adopted by ACC to further its substantive contribution to the reform process**, as outlined in the ACC joint statement, with a view to adjusting and adapting it to emerging requirements. Thus, for example, coordination in the sciences and their application for policy formulation may well require renewed attention in the period ahead.

16. ***Within the reform-related work programme formulated by ACC at its second regular session of 1996, ACC may wish to address, at its second regular session of 1997, the issue of the strengthening of the system's links with civil society, as an important dimension of the system's reform agenda, on the basis of the ongoing preparatory work within the ACC subsidiary machinery.***

Notes

* Discussed at a private meeting of ACC on 10 April 1997; see main text, paras. 2-17.